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## Human rights to be determined by voters

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By Jennie Miller  
 C & G Staff Writer

**FERNDALE** — Fight for your rights.

The Ferndale City Council doesn't give up that easy and is placing the exact same item on the ballot this fall that was already defeated by voters six years ago.

City officials feel that things have changed over the years in Ferndale, and that this time around, voters will do what they feel is right for the community and for humanity.

"I can't imagine why someone would vote against something like this," said City Councilman Scott Galloway of the Human Rights Ordinance, which protects residents against discrimination based on issues such as gender, race, religion or sexual orientation.

"A number of progressive cities in the state have been passing these: Detroit, Kalamazoo, Ann Arbor, Huntington Woods," Galloway said. "I think it is largely symbolic, much in the way of medical marijuana or run-off voting. The idea is if enough of these cities get together, maybe there'll be pressure on the states to do the same, and eventually, the nation."

The measure was defeated by 51 percent to 49 percent of the votes cast in the February 2000 election. The American Family Association, of Midland, fought hard against the ordinance and flooded the city with flyers to dissuade voters from approving it.

It was also bad timing, according to City Councilman Craig Covey.

"We would want it to be in an election when the largest number of voters would vote," he said, looking forward to this fall's election which includes a governor's race, among others.

"I'm confident of the result," he said. "It gives folks plenty of time between now and November to talk to their neighbors and their friends about it."

Mayor Robert Porter sees the city of Ferndale and its residents as progressive and diverse, exactly the kind of community to embrace such a measure as one that protects human rights.

But when organizations like the American Family Association get wind of this, things are bound to shake up a bit just like the last time, Galloway said.

"I suspect the anti people will come out again," he said. "Last time they passed around flyers saying things like, 'Your children are at risk!' It was so offensive. That's the kind of stuff that comes out, and people get scared with change."

According to the American Family Association Web site, the organization "believes that homosexual behavior is harmful and wrong," and individuals "put themselves physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually at risk by engaging in such behavior."

Galloway insists that times have changed and people are more accepting now.

"After years of 'Will & Grace,' gay folks are more out there, I guess. There are a lot of gay-owned businesses in this city. And rather than seeing the city go down the tubes, we're seeing the city continue to improve. Nationally, gay people are more accepted now. And this is a tool people need to have, so they don't get discriminated against. The ordinance doesn't just protect gay folks, it protects all the minorities, religious and ethnic groups."

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